

## The nation expects a lot from the party AL's 21st Council

**F**OLLOWING the conclusion of AL's 21st Council, we believe that the party would seize the opportunity to redeem its pledges and retrieve its credentials. There is no denying that there has been divergence from the democratic principles which was the underlying motivation of the party. And we have seen the gradual erosion of the established political values and, often, the leadership has strayed from the path of transparent and equitable governance. The auxiliaries of the party have broken away from their leash and, on occasions, gone completely berserk despite the party president's warnings and admonitions. And all these have been clearly voiced by none other than the party president herself from time to time.

It is an incontrovertible fact too that a few party leaders at various levels, particularly those belonging to the party ancillaries, had indulged in unashamed misuse of power, often driven by an unmitigated sense of impunity. Misuse of power always goes hand in hand with, corruption; this has permeated at all levels of the party, defying the party president's warnings. Unfortunately, abuse of power and corruption have combined to tarnish the image and erode the credibility of the party. And these have, consequently, diminished the significance of the achievements of the government, making all the talk of good governance sound hollow.

However, we are glad to see that Sheikh Hasina believes that, like charity, cleansing should also begin at home. She has acted decisively against some of her party men and we hope that she would brook neither abuse of power nor corruption within her party anymore. And we believe too that Sheikh Hasina would deliver on her resolve to give us good governance. That is what the nation expects.

## Alarming mismanagement of medical waste

*This needs immediate rectification*

**A** report published by this daily on December 22 on the mishandling of medical waste in Rajshahi is symptomatic of the overall reluctance of medical authorities in managing medical waste across the country. Every few days, this daily publishes reports and writes editorials on the mismanagement of medical waste, only to fall on deaf ears, apparently.

According to the report in question, despite having coloured boxes to sort medical waste at the 205 hospitals and medical centres across Rajshahi, the wastes are all dumped in landfills, on roads and roadside bins, all mixed together. And this is dangerous and pose serious health risks, especially because half of the three tonnes of medical waste generated in Rajshahi is infectious. Little children and grownups work in the landfills to sort the waste with their bare hands, often injuring themselves with sharp medical waste objects like syringes, which can increase exponentially the spread of contagious diseases.

According to DGHS any healthcare facility must have an incinerator, autoclave and effluent treatment plants to dispose of hazardous medical waste; of all the 205 healthcare centres in Rajshahi, only Rajshahi Medical College (RMC) has an incinerator, that too almost in tatters. Currently, the Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) is responsible for their medical waste management, and their work isn't flawless. RCC has initiated a Tk 2 crore project with an NGO to deal with this problem, which is likely to go into production next year. And the NGO will only dispose of the solid waste. So, what happens to the rest?

Medical waste—general, infectious, hazardous, radioactive—mishandled, can unleash epidemic-scale health crisis. In view of this pervasive problem, the concerned authorities—not just in Rajshahi, but all over the country—should take this matter seriously and correct their course before it is too late.

# Has Bangladesh provided an excuse for Suu Kyi's defence?

KAMAL AHMED

**I**T was another reprehensible act of genocide denial. While defending the indefensible at the world court, the International Court of Justice, housed at the Peace Palace in the Dutch city The Hague, last week the once globally revered Peace Laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, was remarkably unashamed. She and her legal team did not deny all those facts of wrongdoing mentioned in the petition filed by the Gambia including of atrocities, brutalities, forced mass-deportation, use of sexual violence, spreading hate and discrimination against an ethnic minority group, the Rohingyas. Their strategy was based on three Ds—denial, distraction and deflection.

First was denial of the intent to commit genocide. Comparisons made with other genocides were so pathetic, that inference could be drawn that the number of Rohingyas killed were not sufficient to call it a genocide. Admitting brutalities, Ms Suu Kyi said, "it cannot be ruled out that disproportionate force was used by members of the defence services in some cases in disregard of international humanitarian law." But her defence was: "surely, under the circumstances, genocidal intent cannot be the only hypothesis." She argued that the Genocide Convention came into being on the backdrop of the killing of six million Jews. In Rwanda, 70 percent Tutsis were slaughtered. Professor William Schabas of Middlesex University cited the court's verdict on the Croatia vs. Serbia case on the premise of attempting to destroy an ethnic group on whole or a part. He argued, "killing non-combatants in an armed conflict may violate right to life. But, 10,000 deaths out of a population of well-over one million might be something other than intent to physically destroy the group."

It was quite a surprise to hear professor Schabas, the author of the book "Genocide in International Law", who is better known for his analysis of the Rohingyas' plight in Myanmar dating back to 2013 in an Al Jazeera documentary, "The Hidden Genocide", defending the same genocide as an outcome of a conflict. Professor Schabas, however, justifying his service to Myanmar, later told Reuters that everyone has the right to a defence before a court. But at the hearing his defence was blaming Al Jazeera for using his words selectively. Professor Schabas was put into this embarrassing defensive position by another famous academic, professor Philip Sands of Oxford, who on behalf of the Gambia, submitted to the court that the petitioner would not object if the court in its order includes preventative measures prescribed by professor Schabas in "The Hidden Genocide".

The second element of the strategy of Myanmar was to try to distract by questioning the Gambia's *locus standi*, or right to move the court, by claiming it was a proxy of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, OIC and

questioning about the financing of the case, suggesting something suspicious was going on.

The third and final tactic was to deflect the world's attention to Bangladesh, which so far has been giving emphasis on repatriation and not pro-actively seeking justice for genocide or preventing further genocidal acts. In the words of professor Phoebe Okowa of Queen Mary University: "Bangladesh, the country that has borne the brunt of the crisis, has also entered into a MoU with Myanmar to provide organised framework for repatriation of displaced persons." In her argument, she continued: "This is proof of the fact that Bangladesh, as Myanmar's closest neighbour, is not of the view

But that does not deter anyone from analysing the core issues put forward by both the parties and reflect on some crucial aspects of our policies.

As Bangladesh was not a party to the dispute under consideration by the ICJ, it did not have any opportunity to explain its position. Experts representing the Gambia kept their focus on establishing its right to institute the legal action as a signatory to the Genocide Convention and remained almost silent about Bangladesh's role. Myanmar in its concluding submission again tried to exploit the issue of inaction and the views of the directly-affected party. Christopher Staker even argued with citation (case reference) that according to the International Law Council (ILC),

Myanmar's attempt to shield itself from the egregious charges using Bangladesh's affable position certainly demands some serious contemplation. Maintaining diplomatic links and negotiations do not require top level exchanges until and unless there is a breakthrough. Luckily, such a top-level exchange during the hearing was not mentioned before the court which otherwise could have caused some discomfort, especially when the Gambia referred to the US imposition of further sanctions against Myanmar's four top generals.

Another striking point to note from the trial was the outrageous claim made by Myanmar that if the ICJ were to order any interim measures sought by the Gambia, that it would adversely impact



William Schabas and Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi at the hearing in a case filed by the Gambia against Myanmar alleging genocide against the Rohingyas, at the ICJ in The Hague, Netherlands, December 11, 2019.

PHOTO: REUTERS

that Muslims are at risk of imminent genocide should they return."

The Gambia vs. Myanmar hearing at the ICJ was an exceptional battle over defining the genocidal intent between leading legal experts to make 17 judges rule on whether any interim measures were necessary to protect 6 lakh Rohingyas trapped in camps built for IDPs (Internally displaced people) and secluded villages under harsh restrictions on movement, livelihood, practicing their religious faith and so on. It would be a frivolous exercise to try to narrate here the nine hours of deliberations, filled with legal jargon and references of past cases under international law.

any state could not seek enforcement of *erga omnes* rights or obligations owed toward all in the same way as a directly injured state. Whether the court accepts or rejects this argument we will find it out in a few weeks. But the question of remaining silent on calling it a genocide by Bangladesh is not an ignorable one.

There's no doubt that repatriation of more than one million refugees should get priority in Bangladesh's policy towards the crisis. But it does not mean, a nation born through the most horrific genocide in our part of the world, should refrain from its moral obligation to denounce such genocidal acts and do its utmost to prevent such crimes.

on repatriation, reconciliation and their domestic justice system. Paul Reichler, representing the Gambia, termed this so-called repatriation process a "fraud" and highlighted Myanmar's policy of hate towards the Rohingyas, citing Suu Kyi's refusal to use the ethnic identity of the victim community. The ICJ proceeding has also proven how valuable the UN Fact Finding Missions were and whose conclusions, of Myanmar's genocidal intent reflected through seven indicators, have given hope for justice to the world's most persecuted ethnic group, the Rohingyas.

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## Why Vietnam provides a useful benchmark for Bangladesh



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

**I**F we were to describe the global garment and textile industry as a three-horse race, China would be out in front with two other horses fast closing in. These two horses are, of course,

Bangladesh and Vietnam. Much has been written about the competition between these two countries in recent years. My personal view, which I will expand upon below, is that both countries have strengths in different areas when it comes to apparel manufacturing. For this reason, we have a great deal to gain by looking at areas we can learn from Vietnam in order to improve our competitive position and build on our existing strengths.

The most recent figures show that Bangladesh garment exports between January and September stood at USD 26.1 billion while Vietnamese exports were worth USD 24.43 billion. Taking October into account, Bangladesh exports amounted to USD 27.63 billion while Vietnam was at USD 27.10 billion.

At present, I believe Bangladesh has a number of competitive advantages over Vietnam. It has a more readily available supply of skilled and semi-skilled labour. Vietnam is certainly strong in the area of industry training but the textile industry there faces competition from other fast developing industries which, in many cases, pay higher wages.

There are two other areas where I believe Bangladesh outshines Vietnam in terms of apparel production. One is in the realm of sustainability and—a related issue—factory safety. Bangladesh has the safest garment industry in the world and,

and the rewards for our massive efforts in the area of factory safety are still to be seen.

We are also, as an industry, leading the way in terms of sustainability generally, with many of our factories shifting to new, greener methods of production which use less water and energy and which are less energy-intensive. This shift has, of course, been demanded by apparel brands but our industry has shown a willingness and adaptability to respond. It has taken giant

four million in Bangladesh. This added value will only be matched by Bangladesh if we continue to invest in training and R&D, and surely this should send a clear message to policymakers in our country.

Vietnam has a major strength in high value products, and this is a direct result of the investment they made in training. Vietnam has invested in high standards of education in textiles and apparel, all aimed at implementing new industry technologies.



strides in this area, which are not always visible to the outside world.

But where can we learn from Vietnam? This is where I see huge opportunities. Firstly, it is worth considering that efficiency in Vietnam's apparel industry is higher than ours. Their efficiency is around 65 compared to 40 in Bangladesh. This means their export value is similar to ours despite the fact that their industry has around two million workers compared to

In Bangladesh, while we have lots of textile engineers, we need more innovators in areas such as machinery, software, digitalisation, automation, and robotisation. We cannot afford to allow Vietnam to steal a march on us on these areas.

Also worth noting is that in five to 10 years time, the low labour cost advantage of sourcing from Bangladesh will be obsolete and replaced by automation.

We therefore need smart, well-educated local people who can guide us on how to adapt production lines accordingly, using the latest tech solutions.

Another area we can surely improve on is in terms of proximity of our RMG sector to the ports and associated infrastructure. Vietnam has an edge on Bangladesh in this area but it needn't be this way. Public-private sector partnerships could surely be developed to improve transport routes to Chittagong as well as the broader development of logistics infrastructure, including modernisation of the port facilities.

Finally, we have to look at how Vietnam has aggressively pursued foreign trade agreements, with the EU and Asia Pacific. Can we be doing more in terms of trade agreements? Our primary markets lie in the EU but is there an opportunity to tap into the US market—as Vietnam has so successfully done—or even the burgeoning Chinese market? Proximity brings its own challenges, but it needn't be a complete barrier to market success.

In summary, Bangladesh and Vietnam each has their own strengths and weaknesses in terms of apparel production. Some might suggest that a comparison between the two countries is a fruitless exercise but I believe it is highly insightful, for surely there is no better way to improve one's own standing than by learning from a successful competitor. To succeed long-term, our RMG sector must be on a journey of continuous improvement, and benchmarking against other leaders in the field can be an invaluable part in this process.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Violence against protestors in India

The deterioration of democratic space in India, hailed as the largest democracy in the world, is extremely sad to see. It is particularly disheartening for people in Bangladesh, given the closeness between our two countries.

Protests against the new citizenship law have spread like wildfire throughout India. While it is encouraging to see people standing up for their beliefs and protesting a law they view as anti-democratic, the reaction of the government, which has unleashed such senseless brutality against its own people, is simply unacceptable.

In a video circulating on Twitter, one young woman is seen saying: "If you are acting like the British government, then we will act like Bhagat Singhs." Hopefully the government will come to its senses and pay heed to the concerns of the protestors.

Gautam Roy, Jessore



PHOTO: AMIT DAVE/REUTERS

Protest against a new citizenship law, in Ahmedabad, India, December 19, 2019.